

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) met today with key officials from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to discuss ways to clear a backlog of DNA and make our communities and neighborhoods safer.

"DNA is an extremely important and effective tool for law enforcement," Buchanan said following the meeting in his congressional office in Washington. "I am looking for ways to help improve the FBI's DNA tracking system so we can identify and catch criminals as quickly as possible."

A recent string of crimes in the Sarasota-Bradenton region and the apprehension of a suspect, Delmar Smith, who had served time in a federal prison, has underscored the need for improvements in the DNA database. Smith had provided DNA to federal authorities before his release from federal prison in September of 2008, but it was not entered into the FBI database because of a backlog created by personnel shortages.

Authorities have said that if Smith's DNA had been in the database, they might have apprehended him much sooner and prevented several violent crimes.

Buchanan and the FBI agreed that one possible solution was to have the Federal Bureau of Prisons collect the DNA of inmates at the beginning of their jail term, instead of at the end of their sentence.

"That would give the FBI an early jump on entering the data in to their system," said Buchanan. "It will help ensure that the DNA is in the database tracking system before convicted criminals are released from jail."

The Congressman received assurances from the FBI that the current backlog will be eliminated within the next several months and that thanks to increased funding they will be able to keep the system up to date. The Congressman earlier this month suggested the FBI consider prioritizing DNA entry based on an offender's threat to public safety. But the FBI officials said today that prioritizing would become a moot point once the backlog was eliminated. A better solution, the FBI officials discussed with Buchanan, would be to collect the DNA samples from offenders early in their prison sentence.

The Congressman's meeting was with FBI Lab Director, Dr. Christian Hassell; Acting Chief of the Biometrics Analysis Section, Dr. Alice Isenberg; and congressional liaison, Jolene Chonko.



*Dr. Christian Hassell, Jolene Chonko, Congressman Vern Buchanan*